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NSC BRIEFING

4 March 1959

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- I. Anti-govt student violence in capital last Tuesday could spark widespread efforts of opposition elements to undermine Liberal-Conservative coalition regime of President Lleras.
 - A. Commies are principal promoters of serious demonstrations since early January against recent bus fare increases.
 1. Commie propaganda and agitation has increased recently.
 2. Commies have extended their influence ^{UN} labor movement considerably since regaining legal status late 1957.
- II. Serious riots in February in several provincial cities--mostly for economic grievances--may be another aspect of developing plan of opposition against Lleras.
 - A. Government believes Commies largely responsible for exploiting or even provoking provincial unrest.
- III. Thus far riots almost free of anti-American sentiments but bus fare hikes may be tied to gasoline costs and US oil companies operating in Colombia.
- IV. Dissident Conservative groups and followers of ex-dictator Rojas may seek to magnify and exploit popular unrest.
 - A. Rojas, now on trial for misconduct during his presidency, was detained last December for alleged plotting against govt.
 1. Demonstrators on Tuesday shouted Rojista-type slogans.
 2. Rojas' lawyer linked with Bogota agitators.
 - B. Dissident Conservative press has attempted to justify demonstrations.

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- V. In a speech on Tuesday President Lleras stressed gravity of situation, accused Commies and other political groups of fomenting disturbances for their own political aims.
- A. Govt dilemma: backing down on fare increases would probably mean loss prestige and set precedent for additional violence against authority; suppressive measures likely to erode popular support and encourage opposition. Indecision could stimulate more violence.

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